

Foreword

B E N J A M I N B E N N E T T

"If God had intended us to fly..." the saying goes, or at least used to go. To be sure, the scope of Laurence A. Rickels's *Crypto-Fetishism*, the second volume of *Nazi Psychoanalysis*, extends well beyond the question of how human beings might be made suitable for flying. Especially the idea of fetishism—in the form of a "techno-mourning... that mourns even over those merely integrative moments in works of mourning and substitution"—both receives and reveals unexpected significance.

As techno-mourning, fetishism isn't about the identifiable or identified-with body. For one, it's not about couples. And it's not about losing, just because you lost. It is about winning, like a winner and not like a victim; it's about some power of emergency propulsion that gets us past the totalization and paralysis of loss to the wide open and outer spacing of what in a more couplified era or moment of mourning could only be seen as closed and enclosing delusional states that were the determining limit and dead end of failed mourning.

Radical transformation is the matter here, something like a turning of the world inside out, or perhaps rather a disintegration of the whole "couple" inside/outside in a new space of "greater psychoanalysis" where the internal (intrapsychic) and external (technological, gadget-loving) aspects of fetishism are no longer strictly distinguishable. And yet the question of flying is not merely a metaphor in this context. There is, in fact, no longer any such thing as a "mere" metaphor in the neither internal nor external (nor even spatial) space that opens between our world wars, a space we traverse, if at all, on wings no god ever dreamed of. We can gain perspective on this situation, I think, by first stepping back a quarter millennium or so.

To the extent that a main point exists, the main point of Johann Georg Hamann's *Aesthetics in a Nutshell* (1762) is probably that scripture and history, and indeed nature itself, are all versions of a single text, a single divine writing, and that the purport of that writing depends radically on how the reader approaches it, which in turn never fails to involve the question of who the reader really is. These last two ideas are set forth with perfect clarity, toward the end of Hamann's text, in a pair of quotations, the

first in Latin from St. Augustine, the second in German from Luther. But rather than call Augustine by name, Hamann cites him as "the Punic church father," with a footnote mark on the word "Punic." And if one follows that lead, if one descends here into what Laurence A. Rickels likes to call the text's "footnote underworld," one is dragged further and further away from anything like a main point. That "Punic" refers to Augustine's Carthaginian origins, Hamann doesn't bother to tell us; we're supposed to know. Instead, he begins with a reference to Johann David Michaelis's condescending remarks about Augustine's Latin style, and then jumps, via a pun (what else?) on the word "Punic," to the idea of "punning" as developed in an early-eighteenth-century English treatise (necessarily English, since "pun" in German is merely "Wortspiel") that is variously attributed to Swift and Sheridan, and jumps from there. . . . You see what I'm getting at, and if you have looked at the main text of the present book, you probably see something of my reasons for starting with Hamann and punning. Like Hamann, Rickels has important points to make, about the structure and growth of psychoanalysis, and in general about the impossibility of marking off areas in modernity that are somehow sheltered from Nazi contamination. And like Hamann—who must at all costs deny systematic Lutheran theology access to his texts, lest his thought be co-opted into reinforcing exactly the postlapsarian division between scripture and nature against which it is directed—Rickels has excellent reasons for what he terms his "user-unfriendly" procedure. Psychoanalysis, as Rickels means it, is not, strictly speaking, susceptible to being written or known "about." The pretense of possessing an objective or innocent verbal instrument with which to take hold of psychoanalysis violates the discursive implications of the subject matter in exactly the same way that Hamann's Christianity is violated by theological systematics.

Does it follow, then, that the present work is accessible only to strict insiders, only to psychoanalysts? In fact, psychoanalytic literature abounds with formulations of the peculiarly evasive quality of its core discipline; perhaps the best known is Jacques Lacan's remark that what the unconscious "is" cannot be disentangled from the circumstances of its discovery and the person of its discoverer. The theory of psychoanalysis, we are told, is never fully detached from its object, never in command of it, but always itself a self-relativizing instance of analytic procedure; in Rickels's arguments, specifically, it is the analytic mechanism of transference that turns out repeatedly to be operative, on a large public scale, in the history of the discipline. Everything is provisional or heuristic in psychoanalysis; there is no level of abstraction at which the discipline might in principle stand wholly

revealed to the gaze of pure intelligence. (We think of the aspirations of Hamann's Wolffian contemporaries.) Understanding is never distinct from practice, and to "understand" a work such as Rickels's is therefore always in some sense to be a practitioner. But in exactly what sense?

The parallel case of Hamann continues to help us here. To be an insider with respect to Hamann means to be the adherent of a special kind of transtheological Christianity, or at least to recognize its presence as an analogue in one's own philosophical practice. Therefore it is not hard to imagine why Hegel and Kierkegaard should be among Hamann's prominent admirers. But to find Goethe in this group, the older, "classical," self-consciously heathen Goethe, is a bit startling. And yet it is true that Goethe, who was in possession of some interesting manuscript material, for a long time considered actually editing Hamann. In book 12 of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, he characterizes Hamann as follows:

When a person speaks, he must become for the moment one-sided; there is no communication, no written doctrine, without particularity. Since Hamann, however, was once and for all opposed to this sort of separation, and since he desired to speak in the same all-embracing manner in which he felt, imagined, and thought, and since he demanded the same of others, he stood in opposition to his own style and to everything that others could produce. In order to accomplish the impossible, he therefore lays hands on all conceivable elements of writing.

This does not read like unequivocal praise, and in fact, a few lines later, Goethe speaks of a historical "darkness" into which Hamann's writings descend. But then, toward the end of the same long paragraph, we hear that if we take the trouble to look up some of Hamann's references, we encounter

an ambiguous double illumination which strikes us as highly agreeable, as long as we resolutely avoid requiring what one would usually call an "understanding" of it. Such pages therefore deserve to be called "sibylline," because one cannot take them in and for themselves, but must wait for the occasion when one is specially moved to seek refuge in their oracular quality.

Surely, when he speaks of "seeking refuge" in Hamann, Goethe is not referring to any specific religious content. What he means can only have to do with Hamann's attempt at an impossible "all-embracing" form of writing. Hamann's texts, I mean, are a place where one seeks refuge *as a writer*,

as a practitioner of writing, as a struggler with the "one-sidedness" of writing—not because Hamann in any degree solves the problem of writing but because, by straining its limits, he *situates* that problem, thus profiles it for us and offers us a "scene of writing" in which our particular performance, though still indelibly marked with futility, makes a kind of quasi-dramatic and historical sense after all.

And by alluding to Derrida's essay "Freud and the Scene of Writing," I mean of course to make the connection with psychoanalysis and Rickels. The kind of practitioner implied as the reader of Rickels's trilogy, I contend, is a *writer*, in the sense obliquely suggested by Goethe for Hamann.

Freud [writes Derrida] *performed for us the scene of writing*. But we must think of this scene in other terms than those of individual or collective psychology, or even anthropology. It must be thought in the horizon of the scene/stage of the world, as the history of that scene/stage. Freud's language is *caught up* in it.

The "one-sided" move of the writer—which Goethe vaguely calls "separation," whereas Derrida would relate it to *différance*—not only is imposed by the world but also in a sense *establishes* the world as a "scene" (and how else would it become "world" in history?) by performing it. Derrida suggests that in writers like Freud, this quality of performance lies closer to the surface than elsewhere. But writers like Hamann—and Rickels—still constitute a special class, in that their performance is informed by a depth of resistance (a "user-unfriendly" stance "in opposition") that strains the boundaries, and thus marks them, and so *sets* the scene of writing. Not permanently, not once and for all: if this were possible, then "one-sidedness" would not be a necessary attribute of writing after all. Rather, as a moment of respite or "refuge," a kind of breathing space. This does not mean that one must "actually" be a writer to read Rickels with profit. But one does have to be able to adopt a writerly point of view, to read without falling into the comfortably dependent relation of consumer to a presumed producer, to manage one's handling of the text so that there is in the end no strict "user" for anyone to be unfriendly to. One must approach Rickels not in terms of "the oppositions sender-receiver, code-message" (these "coarse instruments," Derrida calls them), but rather so as to engage (Derrida again) "the *sociality* of writing as *drama*."

To be less cryptic about it, one can in fact formulate as a proposition the basic implications of Rickels's difficult style. His use of wordplay and allusion and quotation insists constantly on the point that neither knowledge itself nor the objects of knowledge can reasonably be said to exist in a

manner that is strictly prior to, or at all independent of, the discursive acts and techniques by which they are shaped, the verbal garments in which they make their appearance to us. Which means, in turn, that there is no way of describing a clear division between the referential and logical structure of argument on the one hand, and, on the other, the structure of relations (the arbitrarily grammatical as well as the associative and allusive) that constitute the general verbal horizon in which we happen to be operating. Rickels's particular talent as a stylist is his ability to keep this proposition in the foreground of his presentation, even while suggesting a large number of specific and cohesive interpretive arguments on another level. And just this foregrounding, in turn, is crucial in relation to the subject matter, including the inseparability of theory and practice in psychoanalysis, and the impossibility of establishing a strict division between the two concepts in the work's main title. Foregrounding, however, is the form in which this point appears in Rickels, not formulation; for formulation (including the one I have just suggested) automatically offers its reader the safe, separated position of a consumer (we recall Goethe on "separation"), which contradicts exactly the point being formulated. Formulation requires understanding as a response. But as Goethe says of Hamann, "understanding" is out of place here. How can this be? What do we *miss* in the present text by "understanding" it?

Rickels answers this question when he speaks of his project as the "excavation" of material and the maintenance of its "materiality." The trouble with systematic argument in general, and our understanding of it, is that it (so to speak) dematerializes its material, imposes on the material an order that supplants the structure of the experience of finding it more or less unprepared. This is not to say that either Rickels or we are trying to preserve cultural-historical material in something like an "original" state—a state of the sort that can in fact never reasonably be said to exist. Nor can either we or Rickels reliably reproduce the more or less immediate experience of seeing our not-seeing psychoanalysis. (The ocular metaphor in the pun "Nazi = not-see" produces a contradiction for the understanding here, but not a material impossibility in experience.) Nor, finally, does Rickels ever actually avoid systematic argument. Rather, by the use of balance or tension between argumentative and associative structures, Rickels positions his reader—constantly, from sentence to sentence—so as to enable him or her to go as far as possible (whatever that means in each particular case) toward recovering the materiality of the work's material, without ever losing hold of its (argumentatively established) significance. Materiality, moreover, is also the key to Rickels's use of quotation. A style based heavily on

quotation, once a certain density is arrived at—as in Rickels (or Hamann)—begins to body forth the understanding that meaning in language is never really anything *but* quotation, that *langue* and *parole*, in other words, the governing linguistic system and the mass of actual instances, are not really distinct, that language, even in that aspect that is systematized in grammars and lexica, is entirely constituted by the accumulation of material in the form of particular utterances. Indeed, Rickels's fondness for pop-cultural quoting establishes this point at a more immediate level of linguistic practice than, for example, Hamann's quoting mainly from scripture and classics plus commentaries and glosses.

To the extent that a main point exists, the main point of *Nazi Psychoanalysis* is probably that Nazism cannot be isolated in the structure of modernity, that no element of modernity can be thought adequately without thinking its Nazi component. "That's right, it's about facing the continuity that was there: Nazi psychoanalysis, Nazi Marxism, Nazi deconstruction." But this is not a point that can be "understood" in the normal sense of the word, for understanding it would produce a detached critical perspective for the understander, hence an element of modernity (precisely the intellectual juncture at which this understanding takes place) that is thoroughly purged of any Nazi contamination after all. The point, rather, as Rickels suggests, must be "faced" in all its immediate material undigestibility. Or seen from a different angle, it must be *performed*, as Rickels's style performs the identity of meaning and quotation. If you want theory, you go to Derrida, who in fact produces what is in essence a neat theory of "greater psychoanalysis" in his argument on how the opening of Freud's discourse "to the theme of writing results in psychoanalysis being not simply psychology—nor simply psychoanalysis." But in Rickels, what you get is better termed, if not perfectly termed, performance.

For this reason, finally, I will not attempt to do more than Rickels himself does, in the matter of summarizing the present volume, when he indicates that all the material here is connected, at whatever remove, with the idea of air war, as seen either from aloft or from below. Instead I will simply point the reader toward one or two of what strike me as the most interesting pieces of material. The chapters "Cyber-Lacan" through "On Turing," for example, create an exceptionally dense fabric by which Lacan's difficulty with melancholia and his cybernetic meditations are related to his attendance at the Berlin Olympics, whence the idea of "games" supports an extension of the associative web to Ernst Kris on propaganda, the breaking of the Enigma code, and the electronic battlefield. And a brief mention in a quote at the end of "A Couple of Fetishes" prepares Heidegger—not only

his texts but details of his life, as well—for becoming the rabbit pulled out of a hat ("Hi Ya Heidegger") at the end of a section mainly on mummies, whereupon, by way of a neat association with H. Rider Haggard, the matter of Nazi-period psychiatric appreciations of Heidegger is raised.

It is true that some readers will still be bothered by the associative aspect of this writing, by the virtual structural equivalence in it of "real" historical or factual relations and those verbally mediated relations, as it were material puns (the consonantal similarity of "Heidegger" and "Haggard," which trumps Heidegger's own etymological gymnastics), that one is tempted to call "coincidence." But the thing about coincidence in this sense is that it refuses to go away; there is no home for it, no grave, in our filing systems. A strictly real relation gets used up in its reality, and so always gets left behind, disposed of, by any reasonably adequate representation in language. But a coincidence, whose substance is both verbal *and* factual, or at least the sort of pregnant coincidence that is repeatedly brewed up by Rickels's broad knowledge and analytic skill, sticks in the craw of language, so to speak, and confuses the comfortable triangle of producer-consumer-object, as if reality had wrenched the instrument from our hand and were writing itself. The separation between reality and writing, the space of a presumed visibility that hides not-seeing from view—or as Hamann (who else?) would say, the separation between nature and scripture, which makes space for us to accept, for instance (as not-seeing in the eighteenth century as in the twentieth), the notion of an enlightened politics—this separation is not transcended so much as it becomes, for the time being, in a manner of speaking, hard to swallow.

In other words, as long as you expect Rickels to do something for you—to teach you, to improve you, to take you somewhere—as long as you insist on something "positive," you will be disappointed. Reading, in the age of the novel, is generally understood as the mental equivalent of traveling. When you read—as when you place yourself physically in unfamiliar surroundings—you take a kind of vacation from your identity. This applies not only to the reading of novels, where it is obvious, but also to the reading of expository texts, where you try to be objective or open-minded (which means, not yourself), in order to understand the writing "in and for itself." But this attitude is as misplaced with Rickels as Goethe says it is with Hamann. You are never going to have all of this book anyway. The way you in fact are, as yourself, named, scarred, broken, accidental, radically compromised, like modernity *itself*, is how this book wants its reader, and how you, the reader, want the book.